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Conceptualisations of masculinity and sexual development among boys and young men in Korogocho slum in Kenya

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ABSTRACT
Youth and adolescence are times when young men negotiate their identity in relation to social and cultural expectations of being a man, with enduring implications for sexual health and wellbeing. This study explored how boys aged 10–14 years living in Korogocho slum in Nairobi, Kenya conceptualised masculinity, their perceptions of how masculinities are performed, and the linkage between conceptualisations of masculinity and sexual development. Three bases of gender socialisation were identified: (1) verbal messaging (mainly from parents and teachers); (2) observing the behaviours of older men in the community; and (3) information received from mainstream and social media. Masculinity conceptualisations focussed on financial stability, family life and responsibility, physical attributes, character and religion. Two contrasting portrayals of masculinity emerged in the form of idealised and dominant masculinities. A close linkage was found between masculinity conceptualisations and sexual development. Findings are important for programmes that aim to transform harmful gender norms and signal the need for longitudinal research exploring how gender beliefs may change over time.

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Introduction

Early adolescence (ages 10–14 years) represents an important developmental period in the lives of boys and young men (Blum, Mmari, and Moreau 2017). In addition to navigating biological, psychological, social and cognitive changes (Kar, Choudhury, and Singh 2015), it is a time when boys learn to negotiate and construct their masculinity—characteristics that are generally attributed to men (Galambos, Berenbaum, and McHale 2009; Kågesten et al. 2016). According to Addis and Mahalik (2003), the

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process of constructing masculinities is influenced by dominant groups in a society and learned through observing what most people do (descriptive norms), perceptions of what people ought to do (injunctive norms), and observing what popular people do (cohesive norms). Masculinities are dynamic in that masculine positions, practices and values differ from one context to another and over time (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Men who fail to meet masculine expectations are often regarded as unmasculine or effeminate (De Visser and McDonnell 2013; Izugbara 2015).

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) conceptualises masculinity as relational to femininity implying the creation of gender hierarchies and the centrality of women (and femininity) to notions of masculinity, particularly in heterosexual relationships. In patriarchal contexts, the gender hierarchy is often constituted in relation to hegemonic masculinity—or the cultural expression of the dominant form of masculinity that governs and subordinate's femininity and other patterns of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Stern, Cooper, and Greenbaum 2015), resulting in gender inequities.

Gender inequities in turn have implications for men's sexual and reproductive health. Often, dominant masculine norms are associated with sexual exploration, prowess and conquest in heterosexual relationships, behaviours that are linked to sexual risk-taking including early sexual debut, multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships, unprotected sex, transactional sex and sexual violence (Coles 2009; Izugbara and Undie 2008; Stern, Cooper, and Greenbaum 2015).

Masculinity and sexual development in early adolescence

Early adolescence has been referred to as a period of sexual socialisation, exploration and experimentation that shapes adolescent boys' sexual development trajectories (Sommer 2011; Sommer, Likindikoki, and Kaaya 2014; Kågesten et al. 2018). Signifying a transition from childhood to adulthood, the physical and sexual characteristics associated with pubertal maturation are important to boys' conceptualisation of masculinity (Barker and Ricardo 2005; Izugbara and Undie 2008; Sommer, Likindikoki, and Kaaya 2014). The available literature suggests that sexual development is also influenced by sociocultural structures that define the conduct expected for men in romantic and sexual relationships (Kabiru et al. 2010; Stern, Cooper, and Greenbaum 2015), intertwining masculinity with male sexuality.

This study adds to the growing body of literature on the construction of masculinities and sexual development among boys and young men. Conducted in an urban slum—a context rife with high levels of poverty, violence, crime and other social injustice, findings provide insight into how slum contexts shape construction and performance of masculinities, corroborating existing theoretical understandings and providing a basis for comparison with studies conducted in other contexts.

We premise our study on two theoretical understandings both of which view masculinity as a social construct dependent on the context in which individuals live. Firstly, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory focuses on interactions between a person and his environment and involves four components—process, person, context and time (Bronfenbrenner 2005). When applied to the context in this study, the theory

locates boys (person) as the co-creators of their own masculinity through interactions (process) with their environment (context) over a period of time. This time component also captures changes in expectations within and across generations. Secondly, Connell's theory of gender and power advances the concept of hegemonic masculinities providing a holistic understanding of gender hierarchy, the power of dominant groups, the influence of subordinated groups and the role of other social dynamics (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). An important facet of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexual discourse, defined as stereotypical gendered norms and expectations considered appropriate for men and women within and across institutions, including sexual relationships (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Methods

Study design and setting

Qualitative data were collected in December 2018 from 27 boys aged 10-14 years as part of a cross-sectional study investigating the co-construction of masculinities and sexual development in Korogocho slum in Nairobi, Kenya. Korogocho is one of the most congested slums in Nairobi with a population of about 200,000 in an area of 0.5 km^2. The slum is characterised by high levels of crime, social and physical insecurity, poverty and unemployment (Beguy et al. 2015), factors that are likely to influence how masculinities are constructed (Izugbara 2015). Additionally, a high prevalence of risky sexual behaviours (e.g. early sexual debut) and poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes (e.g. high rates of early and unintended pregnancies and a high HIV prevalence) have been reported (Kabiru et al. 2010; Madise et al. 2012).

Participants

Thirty boys were purposively selected to participate in in-depth interviews (IDIs) from a random sample of 426 boys who had participated in a cross-sectional survey. Among the 30 eligible boys, three were unreachable at the time of interview. The three boys had background characteristics similar to the 27 boys interviewed.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to capture a diversity of sexual experiences, taking into consideration the age of eligible boys. Selection was based on reported sexual experience during the survey and included 10 boys who reported (penetrative or non-penetrative) sexual experiences and 20 boys who reported no sexual experience. For the purposes of the study, penetrative activities comprised penile-vaginal or penile-anal sexual intercourse while non-penetrative activities include spending time alone with someone romantically attracted to, holding hands, kissing, hugging/cuddling, touching, flirting over the phone, sharing sexual pictures of themselves, and oral sex (Kågesten et al. 2018; Maina et al. 2020).

Data collection procedures

Boys were contacted if during the cross-sectional survey, they and their parents had expressed interest in participating in a follow-up qualitative interview. The first author identified eligible boys from data obtained in the survey and invited them to participate in the interviews. A semi-structured IDI guide was used to explore boys' conceptualisations of masculinity, gender roles for men and women, gender socialisation processes, sexual development, sexual socialisation and sexual behaviours. To explore the role of contextual factors on performances of masculinity, (Talbot and Quayle 2010), we asked about three different contexts—at home, on a social outing with wife/partner, and when attacked violently by a man or a woman—and asked boys how they thought men behaved in such contexts. Data were collected using the guiding questions in the Appendix.

Interviews were conducted in Swahili or English, based on the participant's preference. Research assistants took field notes during and immediately after each interview. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim (those conducted in English) or directly transcribed into English (those conducted in Swahili) by two bilingual transcriptionists. To ensure original messages were not lost through translation, the transcriptionists were briefed about the study to enable them to frame translations within the study context and objectives. Three audio-recordings were double transcribed and transcripts compared. Additionally, the first author listened to ten audio-recordings and compared the recordings with their respective transcripts. Any discrepancies were discussed between the first author and the transcriptionists.

Data analysis

Data were coded using ATLAS.ti 7 software. Broader themes representing key study concepts were developed deductively. The first author then read through all the transcripts and identified an initial set of codes for each theme. At a second level, codes were reviewed by all authors, ensuring consistency by merging codes that were similar or splitting codes that were broad. Codes were then grouped together into subthemes under each theme, while checking for emerging patterns, commonalities and differences using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). During transcription, data from IDIs were triangulated against research assistants' field notes.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by AMREF Health Africa Ethics and Scientific Review Committee (Ref. AMREF-ESRC P399/2017) and the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (Medical) (Ref. M1711112). The National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation in Kenya gave permission to conduct the study in Kenya (Ref: NACOSTI/P/58043/27160).

Written informed parental/guardian consent and adolescent assent were obtained prior to conducting the interviews. Interviews were conducted by trained male research assistants aged 20–29 years and took place in a school within the community rather than in the participants' homes to ensure privacy. Only study participants and the research team were allowed in the interview venue.

Table 1. Background characteristics of participants.

Characteristic	Number of participants ($n = 27$)
Age	
10	6
11	5
12	5
13	4
14	7
Current schooling status	
Not in school	1
Below primary grade 4	2
Primary grade 4 – 6	20
Primary grade 7 – 8	4
Parental survivorship	
Both parents alive	20
Father dead/whereabouts unknown	5
Mother dead/whereabouts unknown	1
Both parents dead	1
Living arrangements	
Lives with both parents	13
Lives with mother	9
Lives with father	2
Lives with grandmother	3
Sexual experience	
None	19
Non-penetrative	4
Penetrative	4

Although sampling for the qualitative study was based on reported sexual experiences in the quantitative survey, this information was unavailable to the research assistants. Instead, to ensure the confidentiality of the quantitative data, participants were asked about their sexual experiences during the interviews.

Findings

Table 1 presents the background characteristics of the 27 boys who participated in the study. They had a mean age of 12 years and only one boy was out of school.

Conceptualisations of masculinity

Boys reported receiving messages on masculine expectations from parents/guardians and teachers (as core gender socialisation agents) and others, including family members, peers, and religious and community leaders within their community.

> Both my parents have told me that as a man I am to be self-sufficient so that I do not become a thief in the community. I can only do this by studying hard to make my future better. (Dominic, 13 years)

Boys also observed the behaviours and roles that older men performed or did not perform, as Gregory, a 12-year-old described:

> We [boys] learn from what other older men do around the neighbourhood. Like if you see a man has a car-wash business, you know it's nice, he has a good life… and you want to have such [a business] when you grow older. Not like men who never work but are always drinking and fighting.

Boys were also exposed to mainstream media, social media and Internet messages concerning how men behaved or were expected to behave:

> On (a local radio station), they talk about how men should support their wives and care for their families. (Chris, 14 years)

Four key concepts characterised conceptualisations of masculinity in this study—financial stability, family life, physical features and character. Additionally, three boys, all from the Muslim community, mentioned religion as an attribute defining a man.

Financial stability

Financial wellbeing not only enabled men to provide for their family but was associated with power, according one higher social status than others in the community. Hiram alluded to the relationships between power, money and subordination not only with respect to women but also other men.

> A man should have money and also a wife at home to be recognised. The wife helps him [by] washing clothes and cooking for him. A man with money can say or do anything he wants, and no-one will question him, even other men cannot ask. They come to consult him about different things. (Hiram, 12 years)

Boys were socialised towards achieving financial stability, mainly through investment in education. Academic success was perceived as a gateway to getting a 'good' job, leading to financial stability and self-sustenance, and setting the basis for good family life. However, even as boys were socialised to believe that education was key to future financial stability, higher education aspirations were often hampered by the poverty levels in the slum which made both education and financial stability unattainable. In his work on poverty and masculinities among older populations, Izugbara (2015) argues that how men deal with adversity such as poverty is in itself, a reflection of how masculinities are constructed or performed.

To meet family obligations, boys observed that most men took up any work available, which included pulling carts, vending water, working at construction sites, washing cars, operating motorcycle taxis and running small businesses. Cliff, a 14-year-old indicated how men who did not provide for their families were viewed as unmasculine.

> There are some men in our area who do not work, they rely on their wives to work and provide for them, which is not good for a man. He will not be respected. (Cliff, 14 years)

Aligning with masculine expectations, boys had begun adopting more 'masculine' roles and responsibilities. At a younger age, boys performed roles similar to girls including household chores, which they characterised as 'helping their mother or sister'. As they got older, some boys had started taking up work similar to older men to earn a living and to supplement their family income. Chris, a 14-year-old said

> I work at the dumpsite, get money and buy my own household items besides taking care of myself and, sometimes, I also transport people around using motorbikes.

Family life and responsibility

There was consensus that masculinity was measured by a man's ability to have and raise a family. At the core of being masculine was the man's ability to provide

food, shelter, clothing and school fees for his children and to protect his family from harm.

Wayne, a 13-year-old described a man as a 'a person who has a home, wife and children. A person who takes care of his family, goes to work and provides for them'. In preparation for family life, fourteen-year-old Jay's parents often told him to, 'plan your life well before getting married to lay a strong foundation for marriage'. For Jay and other boys, this meant investing in education as a guarantee to financial stability.

Boys observed that pressure to conform to masculine ideology, coupled with systemic poverty and limited work prospects bred opportunities for crime as men looked for alternative ways to meet their family obligations. Consequently, some boys started to engage in crime at an early age in search of financial freedom, sentiments echoed by 12-year-old Gregory:

> Men often get into violence, crime and alcohol consumption to hide their problems. Like they can't get a job, so they steal to feed their kids because your kids must eat. And boys think this is a nice thing, so they start copying that, even if they don't have kids

Physical appearance and strength

The transition to adulthood was marked by pubertal changes, including growth in body size, muscularity and strength, having a beard, and penis size. Wayne said his mother often sent him on errands even in the dark, believing he was strong enough to protect himself compared to when he was younger. Although Wayne was sometimes afraid, he did not want to appear unmasculine to his mother and so, he often asked a friend to accompany him indicating 'when we are two, no one can attack'.

A key attribute associated with physical strength was a man's ability to protect himself and his family. Men who appeared physically weak were termed as *wasio na sifa za kiume* (unmasculine) or *walio na tabia za kike* (effeminate). While men's physical appearance and strength are often viewed as important features in sexual relationships (Ninsiima et al. 2018), for people living in slums, physical strength is a basic necessity for hard labour, keeping criminal gangs at bay and protecting one's family (Izugbara 2015). Dolan, an 11-year-old, said 'a man is strong, to be able to protect his family'

For many boys in this context masculinity was also associated with being circumcised. Circumcision as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood was emphasised and uncircumcised men were perceived as unmasculine:

> A man is big in size and age. I can't fight a man. And circumcised. A man can beat up other people to command respect. (Abraham, 14 years)

With a large proportion of Korogocho population coming from communities that traditionally practised male circumcision (Beguy et al. 2015), boys from communities that traditionally did not practise circumcision were sometimes circumcised to gain peer acceptance and to avoid being stigmatised.

Character

Sexual fidelity and avoiding violence, criminal activities, drugs and alcohol abuse were viewed as important characteristics of masculinity (Fast, Bukusi, and Moyer 2020) Thirteen-year-old Dominic emphasised the importance of fidelity:

> When you are a man you should concentrate on your children and wife and not have sex with other people apart from your wife.

Being masculine entailed not only commanding respect but also ensuring mutual respect within the household:

> As a man, I should have respect and also be respected in the society. I should respect my wife and children. When I respect my wife, my marriage will be successful. (Ellon, 14 years)

Other attributes included emotional and behavioural maturity including the ability to handle difficult situations with calmness and being humane, especially by supporting the less privileged in society.

Religion

Being religious did not appear strongly as a masculine trait, except for three Muslim boys who perceived masculinity as being underpinned by their religious teaching.

> A man was created by Allah to lead and has a duty to cater for his wives, children and extended family. (Hassan, 12 years)

Performing masculinity

Informed by literature on the expression and dynamics of masculinities (Talbot and Quayle 2010), we posed three contextual dilemmas to explore masculine performances at home and in public spaces—when a man was at home, during a social outing with his wife or partner, and when confronted with a violent situation.

Two main sub-themes were identified: (1) idealised masculinity in the form of admired masculine conduct, expressed through family headship, protection and provision; and (2) dominant masculinity, as expressed through subordination and aggression, directed not only towards women, but also other men.

Idealised masculinity

An ideal man was seen as caring and a provider. For 12-year-old Yohan, family interests took precedence:

> Most men just relax and think [about] how they will fend for their families because they are the providers. Most men aspire to help out their families in all ways.

Even in adversity, an ideal man looked for any work that enabled him to provide for his family.

> Men struggle to get work here [in the slum]. Jobs are few and those available are not the best. But they [men] have to work so that their children can have something to eat. (Yohan, 12 years)

The majority of boys said that family decisions were made by men. However, three boys challenged this notion as they knew of men who involved their wives in decision-making. Jephat (aged 12 years) indicated women were involved in discussion around prioritising essential family needs given the scarce resources because 'she [woman] runs the house'.

Nevertheless, a majority of boys noted, with some disapproval, that women were 'challenging idealised masculinity' by increasingly finding work and taking up the role

of family provision wholly or partially. However, this was acceptable to a few boys who commented on the high poverty levels in the slum and the need to supplement the family income. A few boys also noted with disapproval, that men were increasingly taking on roles traditionally meant for women. Cliff, a 14-year-old, said:

> Nowadays, you can get a man who is married to a rich woman and he serves as her servant by cleaning utensils, spreads the bed and house. It is not good because when you are seen by other men doing this, they misjudge you. Some even refer to you as the 'woman' and your wife as the 'man'.

Dominant masculinity

Although widespread among men in Korogocho (Beguy et al. 2015; Izugbara 2015), dominance, aggression and violence were largely perceived as unmasculine. According to 13-year-old Basil, men's financial stability enabled them to exert dominance and control over women and to some extent over other men, often receiving recognition in the community:

> A man should have a lot of wealth especially money to be recognised. Even other men will acknowledge your presence. You are invited to *harambees* [fundraising events]. When you speak, others listen.

In consequence, men viewed women who took paid work as a challenge to their masculine dominance as men and women competed for scarce job opportunities. Such women were met with hostility resulting in economic and physical violence (Fawole 2008):

> Men feel bad and disadvantaged, they start abusing the women who take up their[men's] roles or still, beat them up. They feel it is not the role of women to work. (Yohan, 12 years)

Observing such behaviours might have directly influenced the boys' voiced disapproval of women taking the jobs noted above.

How a man reacted during violent attacks was in itself, a demonstration of masculinity. If attacked by another man, ordinarily a man fought back both in self-defence and to avoid being termed as weak, unmasculine or effeminate. Even so, in line with the legal context, many men reported violence to the authorities.

> Most men take the matter into their own hands and may injure the other person [perpetrator], while some report to the police. (Hasani, 11 years)

That said, 14-year-old Jay indicated that a man might choose to walk away if he perceived his attacker was stronger than himself, or a known criminal:

> A man will fight back, always. If not, they become the laughing stock. If you cannot defend yourself, how will you defend your family? But if the person attacking is a big and strong man, most men keep quiet, walk away to avoid more trouble or avoid being physically injured and plan on how to retaliate.

Boys associated men's violence with the use of alcohol and illicit drugs, which prevented them from resolving conflicts amicably. Twelve-year-old Jephat said 'some men behave very badly when they go out. They fight and some even kill others because of drunkenness'. Men were said to be more restrained when the perpetrator was a woman. As 14-year-old Ellon said, 'a man is not supposed to fight a woman'. However,

in some circumstances, a man might fight back in self-defence or to avoid being seen as a 'weakling who can be fought by a woman'.

Masculine dominance was also present in romantic relationships. Yohan, a 12-year-old expressed how a man 'will fight [a woman] because he thinks another man is interested in [her]'. Similarly, a man would fight another man whom he thinks is interested in his woman. Yohan gave an example of his neighbour '… a man in our plot [housing block] was beaten because he danced with another man's wife in the presence of her husband'.

Masculinity and sexual development

As they transition to adulthood, boys are often perceived to have sexual freedom, unlike girls (Ninsiima et al. 2018). However, the majority of boys in our study viewed 'sex [as] bad if you are not married', terming sexual activity beforehand a 'bad behaviour'. Concurrent and extra-marital sexual relationships commonly known as *mpango wa kando* (taking a mistress) were prevalent among men in Korogocho. Cosmo, a 10-year-old, alluded to them and to boys' early exposure to sexual activity:

> Most men behave very badly by even doing sex on the road in the sight of children because of being drunk. They cannot get a lodging because they have used all their money on alcohol, and their wife is at home. But some take their girlfriends home when their wife is not there.

Such concurrent and extra-marital sexual relationships had an influence on boys' sexual attitudes and behaviour. Basil, a 13-year-old asked:

> It (sex) is a nice thing. It makes you a man. How can you be a man if you cannot have sex with your girlfriend?

The eight boys who reported having had sex were unanimous in saying that sexual experience made them feel masculine. All were between 13 and 14 years of age. Jimmi, a 14-year-old, explained 'it [sex] made me feel so nice and lively as a man'. Boys spent time with peers talking about girls:

> We talk about how to caress girls, how they can get pregnant especially if it's at night and how we should use condom whenever we have sex to avoid making girls pregnant. We also teach each other how to court and sweet talk girls. (Ellon, 14 years)

Most sexual relationships began with boys giving presents to girls and girls reciprocating by showing affection or having sex.

> The first time, I gave her (girlfriend) ten shillings to buy chips, she kissed me. And then on a Saturday when her mother went to the market, I bought her chips again and then we did it [had sex] (Basil 13 years)

Asked where he got the money to buy chips from, Basil said, 'I clean motorbikes for pay after school and weekends'. Taken together, boys viewed becoming sexually active as a key element in the development of masculinity.

Discussion

The construction of masculinities begins at an early age. Our findings provide insights into how boys in Korogocho slum conceptualise masculinity, their views on how

masculinities are performed, and the linkage between masculine ideologies and sexual development in early adolescence.

In this study, masculinity was conceptualised in terms of independence, financial stability and the ability to provide for and protect one's family; physical characteristics and emotional strength, aligning with notions of hegemony (Coles 2009; Morrell et al. 2013; Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014). Men who attain these masculine ideals manifest more power than women and other men.

In contrast to findings from other studies among young people in which sexual prowess and aggression were viewed as masculine traits (Andersson 2008; Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes 2014), boys in this study conceptualised masculinity in terms of fidelity in sexual relationships and the avoidance of violence and crime, indicating an attempt to resist dominant masculine ideologies and implying evolving meanings of masculinity Despite this, boys noted that violence, crime and sexual-risk taking were prevalent among men in Korogocho, findings also reported by Beguy et al. (2015) and De Meyer et al. (2017).

The conflict between the boys' conceptualisations of masculinity and observed sexual behaviours among adult men is a clear indicator of the struggles boys have to deal with as they develop their own masculinity. With past research suggesting that social norms influence health behaviours (Rimal and Real 2005; Mahalik et al. 2013), boys are likely to adopt the behaviours they observe among adult men in their communities. This calls for sexual and reproductive health programmes targeting boys and young men not only to address individual level factors but also socio-cultural norms likely to impede positive gender norm change.

Similar to Izugbara's study on the construction and performance of manliness among adult men in Nairobi's slums (Izugbara 2015), expectations of men as providers persisted even in times of adversity. The few jobs available were perceived to be of lower status than would be ideal for a man, yet were different from what a 'woman's job' entailed (Mudege and Ezeh 2009; Clark et al. 2017). Failure to find work may result in ostracism and stigmatisation due to men's inability to meet masculine obligations (Kågesten et al. 2016; Closson et al. 2019; Fast, Bukusi, and Moyer 2020) and may trigger a sense of fragility (DiMuccio and Knowles 2020) motivating a variety of compensatory behaviours such as violence and crime. Elsewhere, Gibbs, Sikweyiya, and Jewkes (2014), Closson et al. (2019) and Fast, Bukusi, and Moyer (2020) have argued that contextual influences hindering men's ability to provide for their families may lead to a gender role conflict with heightened risk of gender-based violence, risky sexual behaviours and alcohol and substance use. In line with such an argument, we found that women who took up paid work were perceived to be challenging the dominant notion of men as providers and decision-makers, perhaps placing them at risk of gender-based violence. Despite the risk of gender-based violence, women challenging dominant masculinities signified flaws in how masculinities are conceptualised, and such flaws present a window of entry for interventions to challenge gender-inequitable norms.

For boys in this study, educational achievement was linked to career success, financial stability and self-reliance, yet for the majority of men living in Korogocho, educational attainment was often unachievable. Unpublished data collected in 2018 as part of the

impact evaluation of the Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe lives (DREAMS) partnership in Korogocho slum (Birdthistle et al. 2018) revealed that among 1,070 men aged 15–49 years, only 8% had completed tertiary education. Whether higher education provides a pathway to achieving the masculine ideology of financial stability in Korogocho could be answered using longitudinal research.

Heterosexuality and procreation, mainly referenced as family life, were key masculine attributes among study participants. Sexual relationships were seen as central to masculinity with a man's financial worth perceived to enabling him to attract and retain sexual partners. Similar to research showing that men are more likely to be trusted by their intimate partners if they provide for and protect them, (Ott 2010; Bell, Rosenberger, and Ott 2015), by finding work and improving their financial wellbeing, boys were likely to improve their chances of attracting girls.

Similarly, sexual experiences—for those participants who reported previous sexual activities—made boys 'feel like a man' endorsing masculinity ideologies related to men's sexual behaviour. Since boys were socialised to delay sexual activity until marriage, their reported sexual experiences and their linkage to masculinity were likely to be influenced by observed behaviours among older men in the community. Considering that some masculine norms in relation to sexual relationships have been associated with poor sexual health among men (Izugbara and Undie 2008; Ott 2010), our findings reflect a need to engage boys with sexual health information before they start sexual activity.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study. First, while the study focussed broadly on sexual development, participants made no reference to same-sex practices and relationships, thus, our findings relate only to heterosexual relationships. Second, given the purposively selected sample, our findings are not generalisable, yet, we hope the insights we have gathered are of interest to other contexts. Third, while we conducted quality checks of the transcripts' translations, it is possible that some local meanings may have been lost during the process of translation.

Conclusions

This study adds to the growing body of literature on the construction of masculinities and sexual development among boys and young men. Our findings show that the boys' conceptualisations of masculinity are shaped not only by information they receive, but also by observing behaviour of other men locally. Programmes on masculinity and gender-related issues need to address these practices and the community and social norms they build upon and convey.

Our findings also suggest that ideologies of masculinity are likely to influence sexual development and behaviour from an early age. Early adolescence provides a window of opportunity to influence these ideologies (Kågesten et al. 2016). Future interventions however should recognise sexual development as a normative rather than a risky developmental process so as to promote healthy behaviours and outcomes.

As economic hardships coupled with masculine dominance increase the risk of gender-based violence, programmes working to transform dominant norms of masculinity need to empower boys to deal with and challenge the contextual expectations that are often unattainable.

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Appendix. Interview guide

1. When I say the word 'man', what comes to your mind? And a 'boy' of your age?
2. How should a man generally behave? (Probe for sexual activity, financial provider, need to prove masculinity) How should a boy of your age behave?
3. How do young boys learn of what is expected of them as men in Korogocho? What rules do they need to follow? And rules from who? Probe for peers and family (siblings, parents)
4. What messages have you received from your family about behaving like a man, specifically the roles of men?
5. How do you think most men behave in the following situations and why?
    a. When at home with their family?
    b. When they go out with their wives/girlfriends?
    c. When they are attacked by a man/woman in a violent way?